

City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item F-2
March 25, 2008
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL

City Commission

Mayor Slesnick Donald D. Slesnick, II

Vice Mayor William H. Kerdyk, Jr.

Commissioner Maria Anderson

Commissioner Rafael "Ralph" Cabrera, Jr.

Commissioner Wayne "Chip" Withers

City Staff

City Manager, David Brown

City Attorney, Elizabeth Hernandez

City Clerk, Walter J. Foeman

City Clerk Staff, Billy Urquia

Chief Hammerschmidt, Police Department

Major Mark Ginn, Police Department

F-2 [Start: 11:01:58 a.m.]

DISCUSSION ON MECHANICAL LIFTS AND RELATION TO THE OVERALL PARKING RATIOS ON NEW DEVELOPMENTS IN THE CITY – VICE MAYOR KERDYK.

Mayor Slesnick: Okay, Mr. Kerdyk, you have got items F-2 and F-3.

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: Yes, thank you, Mr. Mayor. First of all, I would like to ask for a deferral on F-3 and to bring it back at the next Commission meeting. But, with regards to mechanical lifts, this discussion really comes in light with our last Commission meeting when we had or approved a project at 4311 Ponce de Leon, and in that project, the project had approximately 45 percent of its parking requirements were met with these lifts parking. Now, remember lift parking is old technology. This is quite different from what Commissioner Cabrera has brought forth which is the robotic computerized smart systems. This is completely different. This is where basically a car pulls in, the platform by hydraulic lift raises the car, and another car pulls below it. So, of course the car cannot be accessed from the top of the lift until the other car is pulled back...

City Manager Brown: Without crushing the other car.

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: ... without crushing the other car, right, exactly. I found many, many interesting items on this lift when I looked over the past a couple of weeks. I was very troubled, with allocating such a tremendous amount of parking toward these lifts, and I want to bring some things to your attention, and then ask for your discussion on this

item. First of all, our old Code provided for lifts, but it had to go through a variance process, I mean, you had to go through a variance process. Nowadays, the staff is looking at these lifts as part of the parking situation. As a matter of fact, the lifts are looked upon on a one to one proportion, and these lifts are not varianced. In other words, the only reason that we saw these lifts at the last commission meeting was the fact that that was a mixed-use project. Otherwise, if you are building a project as of right and you are including these in their parking performa, we wouldn't even see this at the City Commission meeting level. So, there are no percentages that are allocated on a Commission level, and we don't even see them on a Commission level because it's approved at the Board of Architects from the structure standpoint and then from that standpoint if the project if it is as a right proceeds along from that point forward. So that's one thing. The other thing that was interesting when I looked at it, is initially in 2006 when we saw the initial drafts of the Code that was presented, there was a provision in there that said non-residential parking lifts shall be attended 24 and 7. Twenty-four hours seven days a week by the building owner. We had that stricken from the Commission level because we felt that it was too cumbersome to the building owner themselves. But, after looking in retrospect, it would be these lifts to just the tenants, and I personally believe that it's going to create a parking issue. Now the one argument that these lifts have with is considerable a survival debatable point, is the fact that these lifts shrink the size of the buildings because of course you are allowed to stack parking as oppose to spreading the parking out -- all throughout, and that is true throughout to a certain extent. However, I personally believe that substantially mitigated from the fact that the developer now can build more square footage because of course; he can reach the parking ratio easier. So, in my opinion, these parking lifts even though they help the developer get to the parking ratio, I feel that as cumbersome as I know these things are, they could provide a real parking issue for these buildings that now have these computers... these mechanical lifts inside their systems. And, I really believe, that this Commission needs to make a determination about the percentage that we will allow in each development, that to be allocated to the mechanical lifts. I must share with you, and I am going to leave the person, leave the developer blank. But, one of the developers I was talking to him had these mechanical lifts in his project that is being built right now, and I was talking to him about it, and he told me that he felt that if he was to put these mechanical lifts in the bottom garage apartment and that he had it allocated but that they would never be used toward this development. And I can tell you, from looking at my own perspective and knowing the fact that I have stacked parking at the back of my building and how much of a problem that is, to think about how cumbersome these mechanical lifts are is something that the City Commission has to give due consideration to. And the thought that we are allowing these parking spaces to be on a one to one basis is to me, incorrect. Many cities are carrying them on a one and a half to one basis or something else, but we need to come up with a determination from our level on how to proceed with these mechanical lifts, and I would be interested to hear what the other Commissioners have to say about this.

Mayor Slesnick: Well, this is something I thought about since the last Commission meeting, too. In fact, I actually went to David and said why don't you get P and Z to prepare an ordinance to restrict it to 25 percent. When he informed me that you were

bringing this up Bill, and I backed-off to wait to hear your commentary. So, all I can say is, I share your concerns, and I don't have as much knowledge about it as you do about it, but I am willing and ready to consider setting a standard by which they have to be, you know a percentage that they cannot exceed in providing required parking. I think if they should put in more parking it's at their own expense, then that's their business, but if the required parking, I think we should have certain levels that they cannot exceed, the percentage.

Commissioner Withers: You know I can see in the residential developments where that parking space is one owner...

Mayor Slesnick: Right.

Commissioner Withers: ... so if one owner has their individual lift and they are the only owner there, I think that's applicable in there. I do agree on the commercial side, in the commercial buildings, just the whole logistics of it, parking cars and... But, what I think I am hearing you're saying is, we are now seeing fewer floors of parking, and more floors of habitable space is that right? So, I don't know, unless you double count the FAR (Floor Area Ratio) on the parking floors.

Mayor Slesnick: Well...

Commissioner Withers: There are a bunch of ways that you can attack it, but I think we need to see where we want to go with it, and maybe we need to rewrite the Zoning Code to address the floor ratio. I don't know... I don't think... I am not in favor of eliminating them Bill, because I think technology is there

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: Right.

Commissioner Withers: ... or is getting there, but I think that there is certainly a way to work with the technology.

Mayor Slesnick: But, Chip, one thing, and I think you brought it up at the last discussion, you said when we voted for the 10,000 square foot instead of 20,000, we thought that probably no one could ever get there. Didn't you say that?

Commissioner Withers: I was more concerned about the Planned Area Development zone jumping the PAD. I wanted it more in the central development district.

Mayor Slesnick: I guess I thought... what I am thinking is, based on that comment was that even though we approved development on 10,000 square foot, we thought that the size and FAR would be controlled by parking.

Commissioner Withers: Right.

Mayor Slesnick: And we found out two months ago that it wasn't controlled at all.

Commissioner Withers: Right, because of the lifts.

Mayor Slesnick: Yeah.

Commissioner Withers: And that's what I am saying Don, because of the technology here, so I would rather work within the technology than ban the technology and make our rules applicable to the technology.

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: You know I am not so much for banning the technology, I am for coming up with a percentage that we would allot towards each development, whether it's five percent, ten percent, twenty percent, whatever that percentage is...

Commissioner Withers: The amount of lifts they would put in.

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: ...the amount of lifts that they can put in. I would also like to make sure that none of those lifts are attributable to retail space, because we know, Don right, that anybody that has to produce retail space that nobody is going to come use this space and go out, so it would be attributable just to the office space itself. I mean, in my opinion, I think we should refer this to the Parking Board for their input of how to proceed on this and have them come back.

Mayor Slesnick: And this is like a perfect storm, and it goes back to what Commissioner Cabrera talks about a lot on-street parking. If the lifts become unattainable, people don't park in the parking garage they park on the street, on-street parking.

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: That's the problem.

Mayor Slesnick: If we take away the on-street parking to make the development, they don't have a place to park, and so, we really kind of... Somehow, I think lifts don't really provide a satisfactory in and out type of parking for people... and it goes back to your comment about what usage we are assigning the lifts.

Commissioner Withers: Right. I think you know the demographics of our community is that the people that live in our downtown buildings, probably, per capita have more cars than the average person that lives in the downtown building. I bet you our residents have more cars per household than other places.

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: Right, right.

Commissioner Withers: So, we allow that person who has two cars to stack their two cars...

Commissioner Withers: ... then it opens up parking. That was my whole...

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: Right. I totally see it differently between residential and commercial.

Commissioner Withers: That's for sure.

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: I was talking to gentleman who has an 8,000 square foot building, which is different from the developer that was utilizing the parking in the basement of his parking garage, and he told me the following, he has like three or four lifts. He says, you know we can utilize them, but they are such a pain, and they are the last thing that we use. I mean, the very last thing that our staff uses. Other wise, you know, they are parking in the auxiliary parking spaces. And what concerns me is when you are talking about a development that is 150 spaces and others are 150 spaces ... 70 are attributable to these mechanical lifts, I think it's going to create a real problem and exactly what you said Mayor is going to happen. People are either going to park in other people spaces or they are going to start parking back on the streets and it's just going to be a vicious circle that's created and I really think that we should, we can always move the percentage up, but I think it should be a lower percentage rather than a higher percentage to see how it works out and then of course adjust it at a later date. But to start without even having any kind of percentage, and having the Commission not even see this when they put it as part of this development, to me is incredible. Knowing that, knowing that our biggest issue in our downtown area is parking, and knowing we are helping to perpetuate the problem this is something that needs to be done, and it needs to be done sooner rather than later. And if you agree with me to putting it to the Parking Board, I would like the Parking Board to have the input of the staff of the Planning and Zoning at their meeting so that when they come back with a recommendation. If not, you know, I am fine with recommendation that would come from here. Would you?

Mayor Slesnick: I would love to see the recommendation come back.

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: All right.

Mayor Slesnick: Unless there is objection David, I would like to That I mean, we are an inquisitive body, we like recommendations.

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: Right, I think it is important David that we should have it scheduled at the next Parking Board meeting and report back to the Commission very quickly, soon after that.

City Manager Brown: Shall do.

Mayor Kerdyk: Alright, as a point of personal privilege because that seems to be a word that we seem to be using today

Commissioner Cabrera: What exactly does that mean?

Commissioner Anderson: It means that it takes precedent over...

Mayor Slesnick: Yes, but it is only from the persons that are participating in the meeting, not the audience.

Commissioner Cabrera: Okay.

Mayor Slesnick: I am sorry you won't ... can recognize any Commissioner at any time. David, the parking and downtown it all brings to my mind, I asked you a question about a month or so ago about Chilli's?

City Manager Brown: Yes.

Mayor Slesnick: And about the idea about going back to Chilli's to see if ...

City Manager Brown: I have done that, I have talked to the owner and have given them an option to consider to put their headquarters on the third floor, and I am waiting for them to come back to me.

Mayor Slesnick: Just... most of you all, if you haven't heard this discussion before, Chilli's is coming to downtown Coral Gables, and they are going to have a two-floor restaurant. In the beginning they actually wanted to be their headquarters – Chilli's headquarters on the third floor, but we presented them with such an obstacle in parking they said, no, we are not going to do that, and I thought we are losing the national headquarters for a large chain here in our downtown area who would also be sitting on top of their two-floor restaurant to watch over their operations and to make sure that ... I figure they wouldn't let too much grease fly around if they are on top, so I asked David if he wouldn't go back and see what is the problem, if we couldn't solve it, so...

Commissioner Cabrera: Where was the location again?

City Manager Brown: Tuesday Morning.

Mayor Slesnick: Tuesday morning. Okay. The owner of Chilli's was distressed to hear when I told him that he is probably going to have a real PR problem with the ladies, the women of Coral Gables because he didn't realize that it was such a popular store.

Commissioner Cabrera: Some of us guys like to go there too.

Mayor Slesnick: I didn't want to admit it, but I do my Christmas shopping there, Ralph. Remember that gift I gave you last year?

Commissioner Cabrera: Yeah, I wore it and returned it back to Tuesday Morning.

Mayor Slesnick: ... too much time.

Commissioner Cabrera: Come on Don, you know I didn't, give me a break.

Mayor Slesnick: Okay, well...

Commissioner Cabrera: I would have preferred a... never mind.

Mayor Slesnick: Mr. Manager.

City Manager Brown: Yes, H-1...